The Application of Action Design Research to Simultaneously Study and Improve Evaluation Practice

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Main Topics

- **Current Research on Evaluation (RoE)**
  - Overview
  - Limitations
- **Contrasting Views of Practice & RoE**
  - Generic / Technical / Descriptive
  - Case-based / Practical / Developmental
- **Action Design Research**
  - Process
  - Assessment & Next Steps
Current Research on Evaluation (RoE)

- **RoE Purposes**
  - Increase impact
  - Improve methods
  - Understand context
  - Ensure ethical practice
  - Improve individual practice

- **RoE Topics**
  - Impact
  - Methods
  - Context
  - Ethics

Current Types of RoE Studies

- Large-scale, self-report surveys of evaluators about their practices
- Reviews of published evaluation studies
- Critiques of collections of evaluation reports
- Methods comparisons
- Case studies
- Analyses of exemplary work
- Reflective narratives
Benefits of Large-scale Studies of Collective Evaluation Practice

- Descriptive information about common practices
- Provoke questions about practice
- Provide for characterization of the profession
- Provide some level of public accountability
A Partial List of Limitations of Current Research on Evaluation

- “Practice” is poorly defined & limited
- Complexity of practice setting is inadequate
- Complexity of practice process is inadequate
- Variation in actual practice is ignored
- Assumes undifferentiated individual practice
- Weak evidence: unverified self-report data
- Unwarranted conclusions: evaluator only data
- Ecological fallacy
Contrasting Views of Evaluation Practice & RoE

- **Common view**
  - Generic practice
  - Technical knowledge
  - Descriptive and causal RoE methods

- **Proposed view**
  - Case-based practice
  - Practical knowledge
  - Developmental RoE methods
### Generalized vs Case-Based Views of Evaluation Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Generalized View of Practice</th>
<th>Case-Based View of Practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation context is...</strong></td>
<td>not important, does not differ across cases, or can be controlled.</td>
<td>important, differs across cases, changes and cannot be controlled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluand is...</strong></td>
<td>unspecified &amp; or considered generic &amp; unchanging.</td>
<td>specific, well identified, likely dynamic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation practices are...</strong></td>
<td>standardized interventions, replicable, concern with fidelity, purity, strength, duration, and frequency of application.</td>
<td>idiosyncratic, highly variable, original to each case, concern with local relevance, feasibility, and utility of application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant concerns are...</strong></td>
<td>data collection, analysis, reporting, resource management.</td>
<td>design rationale, client relations, dynamic task management.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contingency decisions about practice are...</strong></td>
<td>generalizable and knowable.</td>
<td>case specific and knowable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generalizations about practice are...</strong></td>
<td>based on studies employing sampling, causal analysis.</td>
<td>based on evaluators’ naturalistic generalizations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge is primarily from...</strong></td>
<td>propositional findings.</td>
<td>practical judgmental.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant rationality used is...</strong></td>
<td>technical rationality.</td>
<td>practical rationality.</td>
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Technical versus Practical Rationality

- **Technical:**
  - Propositional, a-contextual, generic
  - The “how” to do something
  - Technical skill

- **Practical:**
  - Judgmental, contextual, ideographic
  - The “when” and “why” to do something
  - Expert judgment
Relative Emphases and Uses of Selected Designs for Studying Evaluation Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Case-based</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design</strong></td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Practical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptive</strong></td>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td>Reflective Narratives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Causal</strong></td>
<td>Experiments</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single Subject Designs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluative</strong></td>
<td>Collective Reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>Meta-evaluations</td>
<td>Exemplars Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Developmental</strong></td>
<td>Comparative Tests</td>
<td></td>
<td>Design Research</td>
<td>Action Design Research</td>
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Action Design Research Process

- Problem Selection
- Solution Development and Testing
- Implementation Testing and Evaluation
- Documentation and Review
Problem Selection

- Problem Analysis
  - Problem
  - Environmental Scan
  - Alternative Solutions
  - Characteristics of Solution
- Review Criteria
  - Significance
  - Feasibility
  - Replicability
  - Cost Effectiveness
Solution Development and Testing

- Possible Alternatives Analysis
  - Identify, develop alternatives
  - Select best option
- Alternative Development
  - Concept elaboration
  - Prototype development
- Resources
- Process
Implementation Testing and Evaluation

- Prototype design and revision
  - Expert review of purpose, conditions of use, resources, intended outcomes
- Prototype development and revision
  - Trials and real-time modifications; necessary conditions, resources, techniques; development of practical expertise
- Developmental evaluation and revision
  - Best case use, variations use, “natural” conditions use;
  - Observations on when, how, why works; continued revisions
- Replication evaluation and revision
  - Author replicate?, colleague replicate? principles of use?
Documentation and Review

- **Documentation** – conditions, actions, results
- **Reviews** – evaluator, client, stakeholders, funder, critical observer
- **Revision** – materials, methods (technical); process (practical)
- **Review criteria** -
  - Own practice - marginal, adequate, satisfactory, cost effective
  - Other’s practice - factors effecting transfer of use
Action Design Research

- Explicit design
- Careful documentation
- Recorded evidence
- Independent review
- Explicit evaluation and redesign
- Carefully reasoned changes
- Replication

- Identification of key resources / steps / conditions needed to make solution effective
Assessment and Next Steps

- Generalization of results
  - Idiographic results
  - Probability sampling
  - Ecological generalization
  - Causal mechanism generalization

- Cost: the obligation of self-corrective practice

- Illustrations and Examples

- Research on Evaluation; Research for Evaluation
Thank you for your attention!


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